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REMARKS

Upon entry of this amendment, claims 5, 8-10 and 15 are all the claims pending in the application. Claims 1-4, 6, 7, 11-14, 16 and 17 have been canceled by this amendment.

Applicant notes that minor editorial changes have been made to the specification for grammatical and general readability purposes. No new matter has been added.

I. Allowable Subject Matter

Applicant thanks the Examiner for indicating that claims 5, 8-10 and 15 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

By this amendment, Applicant notes that claims 5, 8, 9 and 15 have been rewritten in independent form, thereby placing these claims in condition for allowance. Applicant notes that minor changes have also been made to claims 5, 8-10 and 15 to improve the clarity thereof. Regarding claim 10, Applicant notes that this claim depends from claim 5 and is therefore considered patentable at least by virtue of its dependency.

II. Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-4, 7, 11-14 and 17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Mucenieks (U.S. 6,359,508); claims 1-3, 7, 11-13 and 17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Funada et al. (U.S. 6,417,731); and claims 1-3, 6, 11-13 and 16 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Horaguchi et al. (U.S. 6,925,106).

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As noted above, claims 1-4, 6, 7, 11-14, 16 and 17 have been canceled by this amendment, thereby rendering the above-noted rejections moot.

III. Conclusion

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may best be resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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